

Home schoolers convene

Area advocates organize group

By Paul L. Miller
Catholic News Service

MANASSAS, Va. — "A free education, if not done well, isn't much of a bargain," Kimberly Hahn, a home schooling mother of four, told participants in the National Catholic Home Education Convention.

More than 800 people from 28 states attended the convention July 2-3 in Manassas, adding momentum to what seems to be a growing movement among Catholic parents.

In the Diocese of Rochester, the numbers of Catholic home schoolers grew enough by the 1992-93 school year that they formed Catholic Homeschoolers of Western New York. The group is establishing links with similar organizations in Buffalo and in northern Pennsylvania.

The Rochester home-schooling group publishes a newsletter, meets several times a year, and has organized a variety of religiously oriented and field trips.

Meanwhile, a youth group has been formed among the Rochester home schoolers.

That group is open to youths not involved in home schooling.

Hahn, a convert to Catholicism and frequent speaker on Catholic family life, told the Manassas convention that if parents delegate the responsibility for educating their children, "we have to do so very carefully."

"Just because our children are baptized into Christ does not guarantee their salvation," she said. "It is your task, your call, to educate them in the faith."

She also addressed some of the often-heard criticisms of home schooling — that it is an attempt to shield children from the world and that those children won't be prepared to function socially as adults.

"It's not a fortress mentality, where we're trying to build the walls high enough to where the rest of the world can't come in," Hahn said. "The idea that we are home educators because we don't want our children out in the real world is preposterous. We want them to see the world as it really is, as Christ sees it."

"They (the critics) will often confront us with the 'socialization question,'" she added. "Can they walk into a room and be the life of the party, or

even function normally at that party? That's the wrong question. Can my child function in the body of Christ? That's the real socialization question."

Cardinal Jose T. Sanchez, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, told participants that the home schooling conference was the primary reason for his trip from Rome.

"The (Second) Vatican Council has underlined the value of the family in the moral education of children," Cardinal Sanchez said. "The family is not only important, it is irreplaceable in this education."

"The rights and duties of parents do not come from civil law ... but from divine, natural law," he added.

One of the more heavily attended workshops was presented by Chris Glicka, a lawyer with the Home School Legal Defense Association, who discussed recent legal battles over home schoolers' rights.

Home schooling should be protected under the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion and under the 14th Amendment, Glicka said. He explained that the U.S. Supreme Court, while it has not ruled on a home schooling case, has inter-



preted the 14th Amendment to mean that parents have a fundamental right to direct their children's upbringing and education.

The Michigan Supreme Court recently overturned a state law banning home schooling by uncertified teachers, he said. When his association was formed in 1983, most states required home schooling parents to be certified teachers, he added, but Michigan is now one of 34 states that recognize the rights of home schoolers.

"Despite the opposition and (the fact) that home schoolers are outnumbered, God continues to see us through more and more legal victories," Glicka said.

"There are two arguments you should use in local legislative battles," he advised. "First is that this is a minority right.

They love minority-rights issues. And the second is that home schooling works."

Glicka cited national test results showing that home schooled students average around the 80th percentile and studies that indicate no correlation between teacher certification and student performance.

The Manassas meeting was the third national home-schooling conference held in the Arlington Diocese.

EDITORS' NOTE: This article contains reporting by senior staff writer Lee Strong in Rochester.

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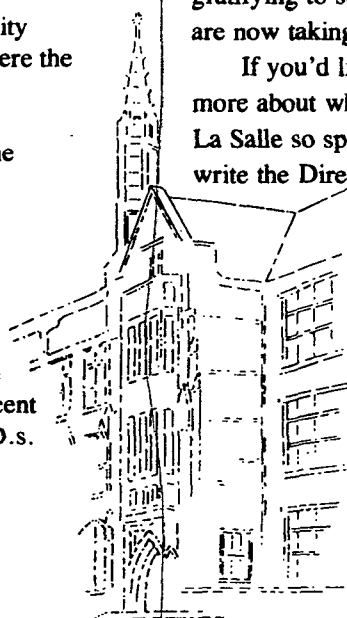
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